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SUBJECT: WOMEN IN MOSCOW CITY LEADERSHIP: AN UPHILL BATTLE

REF: MOSCOW 1647

¶1. (SBU) Summary: As elsewhere in Russia, women in Moscow are underrepresented in high-level positions in politics. On the whole, women do not have equal opportunities as men to run for office because they lack the necessary financial and administrative means and have difficulty overcoming Russian gender stereotypes. Although women are for the most part unable to contend for elected positions, they are politically active and occupy leading roles in non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This cable is the second in a series focusing on women in Russia. End Summary.

Russia,s Women,s Movement Now Versus in the Early 1990s

¶2. (SBU) Since the early 1990s, the intensity of the women's movement in Russia has fluctuated, and in recent years public discourse about women's rights and gender equality has lessened. In the early 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, many internationally-funded NGOs promoted an enhanced role for women in politics. Today, compared to other developed nations, Russia is lagging on women's participation in politics. Despite the fact that Russian women on average are more educated than men, they encounter enormous barriers advancing to top political positions.

¶3. (SBU) Dr. Galina Mikhaleva, Chair of the opposition Yabloko party's Gender Faction, told us May 20 that the women's movement in Russia has declined since the 1990s and that "the women's political situation is much worse now than it was 15 years ago." In her view, the deteriorating political climate is linked to the status of women in that the environment is now less democratic: "There is no real free speech in Russia and no real political activity exists, as can be seen by the fact that there is no political competition in the elections -- everyone knows in advance exactly who will win." Svetlana Yakimenko, the Director at Project Keshar, an international NGO that focuses on women, told us May 21 that women's groups in Moscow were previously active, but about four years ago they became very passive and many faded away. Mikhaleva attributed the drop in the attention to securing women's participation to the existing patriarchal leadership structure; tax pressure on NGOs; a shift in donor priorities; organizations being expelled from Russia; and the Russian government supporting only those NGOs under its control, while creating obstacles for the rest. Yakimenko pointed out, however, that activities do still exist, such as when the second "All Russian Women's Congress" met in Moscow in November 2008 as 1,000 women celebrated the progressive forum's 100-year anniversary, and even Medvedev sent an official letter welcoming the delegates.

Women Leaders in the Moscow Government

¶4. (SBU) The problems concerning women's political mobility

are evident in the Moscow City government. Women are underrepresented in political office in both the Moscow City Duma and the Moscow government. The women leaders generally do not have a great deal of responsibility. The following data illustrate their numbers and roles:

--Moscow City Duma: Six of the 35 deputies are women. In the Duma, they serve on the committees responsible for culture, sport and youth; state building and self-governance; science and education; health and healthcare; ecology politics; security; and legislation. There are certain "power" committees, such as the budget and finance committee, on which women do not have a seat.

--Moscow Regional Duma: Four of 50 Duma members are women, and they work in the following committees: labor and social policy; education, culture, sport, youth and tourism; law, power, and public relations; and healthcare.

--Moscow City government: There are only two high-ranking women in the entire Moscow City government: Lyudmila Shvetsova, the only woman out of eight total deputy mayors, is a well-known first deputy to Moscow's Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. Irina Raber is a Minister of the Moscow City Government in the North-East Administrative City District.

--In the Moscow Regional government: Five of 26 high-level officials are women. They work in the these areas: culture; social protection; finance; education; ecology and natural resources.

Men Dominate the Top Echelons of Political Power

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15. (SBU) According to Article 8 of the Federal Law "On Political Parties," Russian political parties must include both men and women who should have "equal opportunities" to be represented in their governing bodies and candidate lists for elected positions. Yabloko's Mikhaleva noted, however, that the leaders of all seven political parties in Russia (four in the State Duma, plus Yabloko, Pravoe Delo, and Patriots of Russia) are men. In the early 1990s, there were women leaders in several political movements that have since disappeared. Ella Pamfilova, currently the head of the Presidential Council on Human Rights and Civil Society, led the Women of Russia political party, which later dissolved.

16. (SBU) The percentage of women in the State Duma of the Russian Federation is slightly higher than that of the Moscow City Duma. The State Duma consists of 450 seats, filled from federal lists submitted by political parties or blocs. Today 63 women, or 14 percent of the total, are members. Mikhaleva told us that women encounter difficulties trying to get on these party lists. Often women who do make it onto lists are figureheads, as opposed to serious political leaders, or they are replaced later by male representatives. According to Mikhaleva, the women serving in the Duma owe their seats to active participation in the dominant United Russia party, or to name appeal due to prior careers, such as modeling or sports. She argued, "These women do not play a real role, and they discredit women; they are only in the State Duma for their beauty." Likewise, Gyulnara Suleymanova, the Director General of the International Fund of Businessmen, agreed and told us May 21 that it is "embarrassing that gymnasts are in politics! Women should not sit in the government like matryoshkas!"

17. (SBU) Svetlana Aivazova, Senior Researcher at the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Sociology, disagreed. She told us June 9 that the core of the women in the State Duma are 45-60 years old, most of whom are experienced, educated former politicians who held high positions in previous State Dumas or served at ministries or in regional parliaments during the Soviet era. Thus, they were able to marshal the

necessary administrative resources behind them to get into power. Aivazova told us that most of the women currently serving in the State Duma are regional elites, most of whom are from cities other than Moscow or St. Petersburg. She argued that young women and women over age 60 encounter the most obstacles to rising in politics. Like Mikhaleva, she noted that few female Duma deputies have a business background, with most trading in their previous careers as athletes, actresses and ballerinas. Aivazova observed that the number of female Duma deputies has been steadily increasing, but their qualifications are declining, since the majority of the women no longer represent democratic values or civil society.

18. (SBU) A few women have high posts in the Presidential Administration. According to Aivazova, most of them rose in the ranks based on cronyism. It should be noted, however, that Russian women have made serious runs for the presidency. Galina Starovoitova, who was murdered in 1998, was the first Russian woman candidate. In 2000, Ella Pamfilova unsuccessfully ran for president, followed by Irina Khakamada in 2004. There was no female candidate in the 2008 presidential elections.

19. (SBU) In the 83 Russian regions, few women have been appointed to high level office. On the regional level, there are two different election systems: party list and combined single mandate and party list. The party lists, identical to the kind and concept used for election to the State Duma, are usually headed by men. The combined single mandate and party list system is also made up mostly of men because the expense of running for office excludes women who generally lack access to the necessary financial and administrative resources. Mikhaleva argued that for the most part, only people with huge businesses can run. There is only one woman governor in all of Russia, Valentina Matviyenko of St. Petersburg. Matviyenko used to be the only female minister in the federal government, but now three out of 17 ministers are women. There are some women mayors, but they are most often seen in small towns. Yakimenko told us that for the most part, women are found working in lower paying workplaces, such as hospitals and schools.

Women Leaders in NGOs

10. (SBU) The non-profit sector offers an encouraging

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contrast, although it is one of the lowest paid sectors. Russian women are very active in NGOs, and they often have high positions. For instance, The Union of Soldiers' Mothers Committee, GOLOS, the Moscow Helsinki Group, and Civic Assistance all have prominent women leaders. Yabloko's Mikhaleva told us that about 95 percent of NGO leaders in Russia are women. Despite their significant leadership roles, however, NGO leaders receive poor salaries. In Moscow, the statistics are slightly lower, but women still predominate.

Comment

11. (SBU) As in many other developed nations, Russian women face obstacles in rising to top positions. A less than transparent political system further hinders women's ability to advance in politics. As Russia's political climate becomes less democratic, there is much less accountability and commitment to equality and fair treatment of women. In such a challenging environment, Russian women run the risk of sliding backwards rather than advancing toward full equality in political participation.

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